

Freetown Board of Assessors
Minutes of Monday, December 7, 2020
Virtual Meeting – Zoom.us

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Present: Mike Motta and Jeff Field.

Absent: Sue Parker.

Also Present: Lisa Pacheco, George Grunwald, and Trevor Matthews, members of the Board of Selectmen.

Call to order: Mike Motta called the meeting to order at 5:07 p.m. The clerk then read a statement describing orders by the Governor suspending the Open Meeting Law and permitting the holding of meetings via remote participation during the coronavirus pandemic. Also, in conformance with these orders, all votes taken during this meeting were by roll call.

Note: For this meeting, the members of the Board of Assessors were guests at a meeting of the Board of Selectmen.

Joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen relative to selection of the percentage of shift of the FY21 Tax Levy between the classes of Residential and Commercial/Industrial/Personal Property.

Mr. Motta discussed the table showing options for the Residential Factor, which determines the shift of burden between the classes.

Mr. Matthews asked the impact on the average household, and Mr. Motta responded with general information and estimates. In particular, if the shift were to remain at 1.43, he estimated the average household's bill would increase \$66.68 for the year (\$16.67 per quarter).

Mr. Grunwald asked about the history of the shift, and if there was any benefit to changing the shift. Mr. Motta answered that the shift is more of a policy issue than a financial issue – the Town will collect the same amount of money, the shift simply determines how much will be collected from the Residential accounts and how much will be collected from Commercial, Industrial, and Personal Property accounts. At 1.43, the average residential bill would increase \$66.68 and the average commercial bill would increase \$99.14. If the selectmen wish to favor the residents, the shift would increase. A shift of 1.45 would cause the residential average to increase \$37.50 rather than \$66.68.

Mr. Grunwald stated he was in favor of leaving the shift at 1.43, and asked if there was any reason to change it. Mrs. Pacheco felt that the board walks a tightrope, that what benefits the residents does not necessarily favor the businesses. Mr. Grunwald again asked if there was any benefit to making a change. Mrs. Pacheco felt the shift should remain at 1.43.

Clarification was given that the shift is what's being voted on, not the tax rates themselves.

A motion was made by Mr. Matthews, seconded by Mr. Grunwald, to leave the shift at 1.43 for Fiscal Year 2021. The motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Matthews, seconded by Mr. Grunwald, to close the public hearing. The motion carried unanimously.

Other Business

The Board of Selectmen asked the Assessors to discuss two other items on their agenda, being a discussion on exemption and deferral limitations and a discussion on whether to pursue eliminating the Farm Animal Excise tax.

Mr. Motta addressed the exemption and deferral options. The final decision rests with Town Meeting, but the Assessors had queried the Selectmen for their thoughts. Generally, the selectmen felt that the income and asset limits were too low. Mr. Motta clarified that the Assessors are looking more for an opinion, not for approval or blessing. Mrs. Pacheco suggested submitting a warrant article. Mr. Matthews asked if there are any towns that tie the limits to inflation. Mr. Motta confirmed there are provisions in the statutes that would allow for that, but clarified that Freetown has not done that; we have voted a specific amount and left it there. A future proposal could include a tie to inflation.

Mrs. Pacheco asked about the Farm Animal Excise. Mr. Motta provided a general summary, but asked to have that discussion at another time.

Meeting Adjourned

A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

This is a True Record by me.

Attest: _____
Assistant Assessor